TAVISTOCK SANTA CLAUS PARADE PAGE 4

APPLEJACKS FIGHTING FOR TOP SPOT PAGE 20

The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Santa gets a warm welcome from Tavistock's Carson children – Saje, six, and Jordan, four – joined by their parents, Wallace and Kendra, and proud grandmother, Kim Neeb of North Easthope Township. Full story on page 2.

United Way Oxford's 12 Days of Giving is underway

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

United Way Oxford's annual 12 Days of Giving event has returned.

The event, which started on Dec. 1 and runs until Dec. 12, encourages community members to show their Local Love by sharing 12 ways to give back to Oxford County and directly support those in need.

"Each day has its own activity so people can mix and match how they want to support the community over the 12 days," said United Way resource development manager Amanda Kreiger. "We hope that this can serve as a reminder that even the smallest actions can have a big impact."

Activities range from dropping off toys to Operation Sharing's The Christmas Place or 104.7 Heart FM's Stuff the Bus and watching United Way Oxford's Community United Conversation Series to learn about the needs and services in the community, to donating to United Way Oxford.

Continued on page 2

Wellesley Township's draft 2026 budget introduced with 4.99% levy increase, inclusive of growth

Budget deliberations set to continue Dec. 4

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

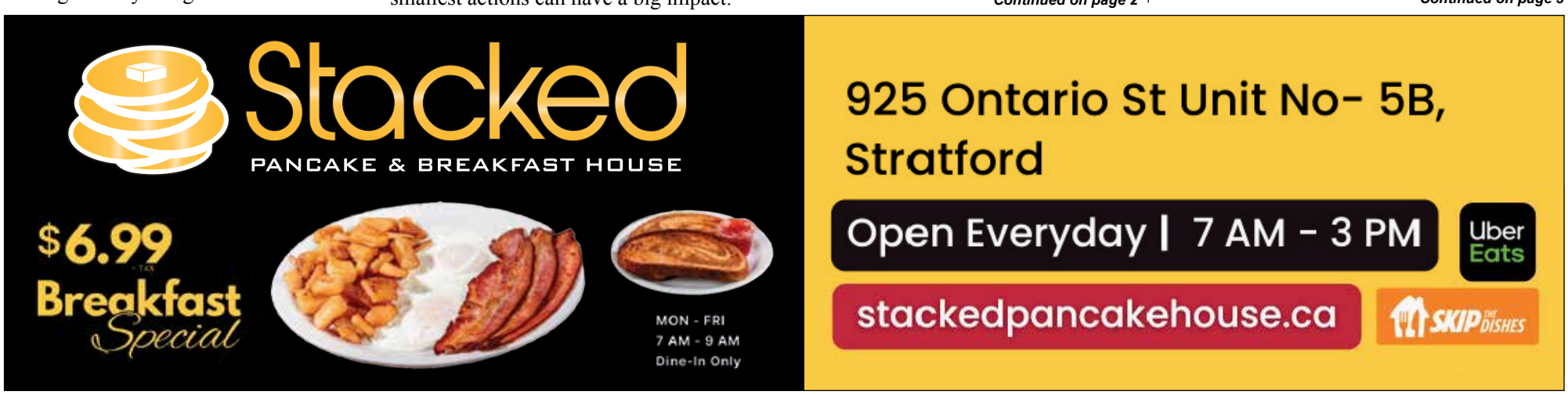
Wellesley council has officially dug into the township's 2026 draft budget, which was introduced at council's first budget meeting Nov. 27 with a proposed levy increase of 4.99 per cent, inclusive of growth.

As presented by staff and left unchanged by council by the end of the six-hour budget meeting, the township is proposing to raise nearly $8.6 million from property owners next year, a number that includes a 0.5 per-cent greening levy – down from 0.75 per cent last year – but not the one per-cent infrastructure levy imposed on taxpayers last year in an effort to reduce the township's infrastructure-funding deficit.

In total, this year's overall levy is 7.6 per cent higher than the 2025 levy, $7.9 million, however the township saw 1.3 per-cent growth – $107,760 added to the tax base – leaving the actual levy increase at $402,249 or 4.99 per cent. Based on that proposed increase, for a home with a 2016 average assessed value of nearly $416,000, the homeowner would see an annual increase to their property tax bill by $66.14 or $5.51 monthly.

"With this year's budget, it's really a matter

Continued on page 3



12 Days of Giving returns, encouraging local acts of kindness across Oxford

Continued from page 1

This is the fifth version of the event that has always offered a dozen different ways for people to get involved. Kreiger said donations change yearly based on the community needs.

"This year, we are collecting monetary donations to support the student nutrition program, housing support to help with people facing eviction, caregiver support for individuals whose partners have been diagnosed with early onset dementia and free in-school tutoring for youth in 19 schools across Oxford County."

All donations go into the Community Initiative Fund, which will be invested into a funding cycle beginning in April 2026. The United Way's funding agreements with its partners run from April 1 to March 31 each year.

Kreiger explained more people are struggling to make ends meet, which also takes a tole on their general mental health, physical health and wellbeing.

"The interesting and hopeful thing about our funding application from last year to this year is last year, we had no collaborative applications and the average dollar request was higher. However, this year we have five collaborative applications representing 35-plus organizations for very targeted work."

She added the average request per application is much lower.

"By working more collaboratively on these issues, organizations can be more efficient with the resources they are requesting. The types of needs haven't really changed – youth, older adults, intimate partner violence, food insecurity, belonging – but the applicants have taken a much more collaborative approach to try to get ahead of some of these issues in our community."

Over that last two years, the United Way had requests to fund programs providing employment supports and financial literacy.

The organization also wanted to remind county residents about 211, a free, confidential information and helpline service for anyone looking for community and social resources close to home. From basic needs like housing and food to support for seniors and children, to responding in crisis situations, a call to 211 is available to support those in need. It also offers innovative solutions to community challenges and partners with governments to improve access to supports.

"The holidays are a really hard time for many people in our community, both with the financial strain of trying to purchase gifts, food, etc., and with the isolation and loneliness that comes at this time of the year for people," said Kreiger.

For those still looking for gift ideas, the 12 Days of Giving also offers the Give the Gift of Hope option, allowing a donation to be made on behalf of someone.

For more information, including a full list of activities, visit https://unitedwayoxford.ca/12daysofgiving/ or follow along on Instagram and Facebook @unitedwayoxford.

Santa a crowd favourite after Tavistock parade

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Santa Claus was easily the most popular visitor in Tavistock on Saturday as children lined up after the Men's Club Santa Claus Parade for a chance to share their Christmas wishes.

His list grew longer by the minute, and his deep baritone voice was beginning to fade as he repeated the many toy requests coming his way.

The decision by parade organizers to station Santa beside the post office after the parade proved to be a smart one. Families appreciated the sheltered spot and parents and grandparents snapped countless photos as excited children took their turn with Jolly Old Saint Nick.

Saputo cheese sticks, along with chocolate milk provided by the Oxford County Milk Producers, were handed out by Santa's helpers, adding to the festive spirit.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Santa visits with mom, Hillary, and her son, Parker Thornton, cousins Emmett and Ollie Bender, and the youngest, Rhea Collins. Their great-grandmother is Donna Brenneman, known locally as the area's top Grade A egg producer.

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Wellesley unveils 2026 budget with 4.99% levy hike

Continued from page 1

of council's work to find a balance," Mayor Joe Nowak said at the onset of the budget meeting. "We know there are people out there that are struggling right now, there are people that we have to be mindful of as far as the service level we provide. I think the ideal scenario would be to maintain the service level that we have now, but at the same time, we have to be looking at the future.

" … By planning for the future, I'm talking about maintaining the reserves at a significant enough level. When you look around at the other municipalities, it seems to be when they get into trouble at budget time, it usually has to do with reserves; that they haven't maintained the reserves. So, I think that's something we're going to have to be dealing with."

According to township director of corporate services Jeff Dyck, one of the biggest drivers of this year's proposed levy increase is a significant increase to the township's contributions to reserves to help close the infrastructure-funding gap and fund future capital maintenance and replacement projects over the next decade. Based on recommendations made by consultants from Watson & Associates, who developed an asset-management plan for the township earlier this year, the township is contributing more than $3.4 million to reserves this year – a contribution that will continue to grow year over year for the next 10 years.

"This is by and far our largest challenge for 2026 and this came directly from the asset management plan," Dyck said. "The numbers that we're … proposing for the budget for 2026 includes fully funding that asset management plan as per direction from Watson. It's a big number, a $629,000 increase to our reserves in 2026. So, it's a massive number for the township, but as you can see, we're able to do that and still hold the actual (levy) increase to a reasonable number. Yeah, it's a big number, but the increase we're presenting is only 4.99 per cent."

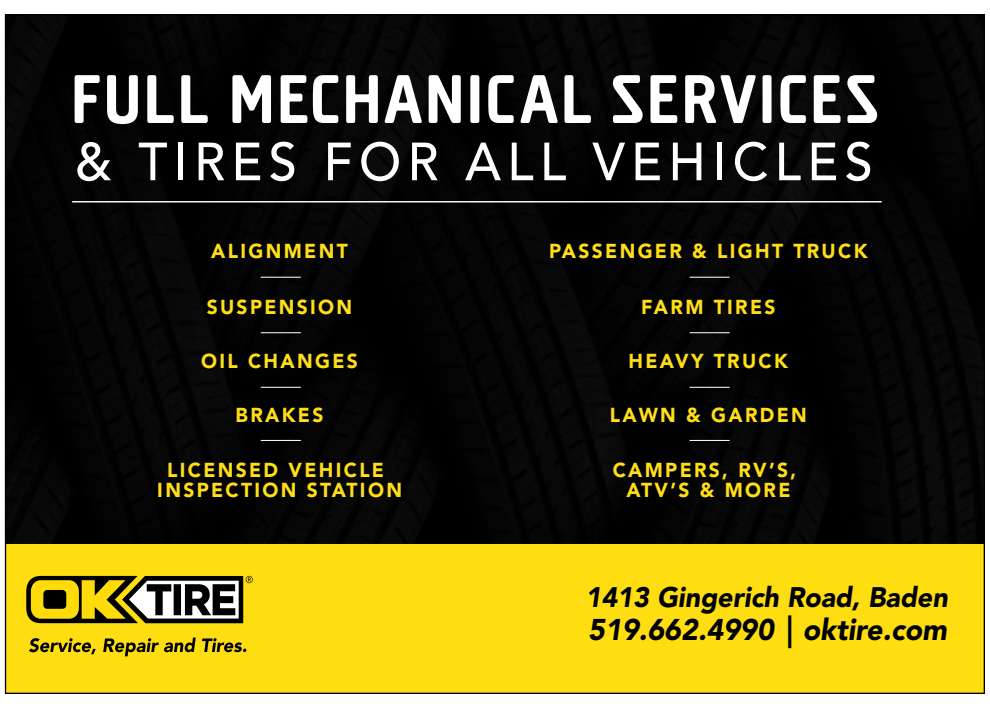
Other big factors impacting the budget for next year include an increase to wages and benefits, which accounts for 40 per cent of the overall township budget, by nearly $254,000; increased spending in public works related to parts replacements and road maintenance by nearly $45,000; costs estimated at roughly $45,000 for the 2026 municipal election; and an increase by more than $87,000 to cost of recreational programming and facility maintenance and repairs associated with the new Bill Gies Recreation Centre in the Village of Wellesley, which will be nearly entirely offset by recreation program revenue estimated at nearly $77,000 next year.

The township will also see a reduction in its Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF) grant by $75,000 and the loss of its Ontario Trillium Foundation grant in 2026, which amounts to roughly $71,000. At just 1.3 per cent, growth to the township's tax base in 2025 was also lower than expected.

Mitigating those increased expenditures somewhat is a higher-than-anticipated gravel royalty expected to be paid to the township in 2026 estimated at $70,000; an increase to the township's Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) allocation by $75,000; and the use of nearly $141,000 from the township's development-charges reserves to offset debt repayments for the Bill Gies Recreation Centre.

Though the township's draft capital budget won't have an impact on the levy increase as all projects will be funded through reserves, grants or other funding sources, Wellesley is expected to spend $3.8 million on capital projects next year including nearly $1.2 million on a new frontline pumper truck for the fire department, nearly $976,000 on road work, nearly $972,000 on bridges and culverts and a total of $167,500 on recreation facility and equipment upgrades.

While council did not make any amendments to the draft budget Nov. 27, councillors will have an opportunity to consider external funding requests at its next budget meeting on Dec. 4.



Tavistock's Santa Claus Parade draws record crowds and festive spirit

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Tavistock's Santa Claus Parade on Saturday was another tremendous Men's Club event, helped along by perfect weather and a fresh layer of snow from two days of wintery conditions.

With more floats than ever and crowds lining the streets, the village was alive with Christmas cheer as families gathered to enjoy one of the community's favourite traditions.

Prize money was generously awarded by the Men's Club for the best floats in each category, with judging completed by Paulette Roth, Brenda Wettlaufer and Leena Kuisiakose.

In the Organizations category, first place ($75) went to the Key Bible Club (KBC), second place ($50) to the Tavistock Agricultural Society and third place ($25) to the Tavistock Optimist Club.

For Commercial Floats, Tavistock Pre-School earned first place ($75), Transition's Acres took second ($50) and Breaking Electric Dance Co. placed third ($25).

Doug Shirray of the Men's Club noted this was the first year there were no family floats entered. He hopes to see more households join the fun next year.

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Shown decorating the Josslin Insurance float are, from left, Chase Osmond, Carter Osmond, Hunter Osmond, Amanda Scheerer, Nick Haycock, Ryan Bucholtz, Sophia Osmond, Carley Osmond and Snowman Scott Wagler.

Transition's Acres' parade-ready animals delighted the crowd. From left are Karlee Walker, Lindsey Wilson (owner), Jordan Alden, Ashley Cociu, Alisha Wilson and Cindy Thorne. Ponies included Moose, Hotrod, Envy, Stanley and Willom, along with Caramel the goat.

Directors of the Tavistock Agricultural Society proudly entered their float to promote the annual fall fair, held the weekend after Labour Day.

Tavistock Pre-Schoolers stayed snug as can be, guided by instructors JJ Bannon, Sadie Harrett (director), Elisha Graime and Linda Holst. Missing was Grace Sullivan.

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The New Hamburg Concert Band brought their signature sound to the parade once again. Grandfather Leonard Koch (trumpet), from Wellesley, performed in his first parade alongside his grandson, Joel Wilson Koch (trombone). Grandma Anne Koch was beaming as she watched them play together.

Jesse Weicker in the back of the truck, as Optimist Club president, shows parade spectators all the youth activities the local club continues to be involved with in the Tavistock area.

Irvin Zehr, who thinks he could be one of the younger thinkers and drivers in the Santa Claus Parade, keeps the South Easthope's Insurance antique firetruck running like new, tuned up by Zehr Automotive (one of the oldest companies in Tavistock).

Free hot dogs and hot chocolate at Tavistock parade mark 50 years of East Zorra-Tavistock

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

This year's Santa Claus parade in Tavistock came with an extra helping of community spirit as East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) marked the 50th anniversary of amalgamation with a free barbecue for everyone along the route.

EZT Mayor Phil Schaefer, joined by township staff, firefighters and volunteers, spent the afternoon handing out all-beef hot dogs and hot chocolate before, during and after the parade. The giveaway was part of a year-long celebration recognizing the 1975 merger of East Zorra Township and the Village of Tavistock.

The mayor said the gesture was meant simply as a thank-you to residents.

"We wanted everyone who came out to enjoy the parade to have a warm drink and a hot dog," Schaefer said, adding with a laugh that more than one person asked whether they were serving "Oscar MAYOR" hot dogs. By the end of the event, 324 hot dogs had been served along with gallons of hot chocolate.

The 50th anniversary celebrations will continue through December. Schaefer said the township will serve free hot dogs and hot chocolate again at the "Meet Santa and Mrs. Claus" event in the township parking lot in Hickson on Friday, Dec. 12 at 7 p.m. The following day, council and staff will enter a festive float in the Innerkip Santa Claus Parade.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

From left, Amy Pfaff (township finance), Paul Albrecht (spouse of EZT health and safety officer Jennifer Albrecht), Mayor Phil Schaefer and EZT councillor and Tavistock firefighter Scott Zehr keep parade watchers fed as part of East Zorra-Tavistock's 50th anniversary celebrations.

The mayor said he was grateful for the many residents who stopped to offer thanks, appreciation and even the occasional piece of advice.

"Positive comments and suggestions are always welcome," he said.

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East Zorra-Tavistock student awarded prestigious OFA scholarship

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Six exceptional individuals pursuing careers and leadership roles in Ontario's agriculture sector have been recognized by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) with scholarship awards of $2,000 each.

One of them is a well-known student from East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) who is in her fourth year at the University of Guelph. Nicole Danen is studying agricultural science. She grew up on a dairy farm near Tavistock and is actively involved in a wide range of activities, including 4-H, Oxford County Junior Farmers, College Royal and the OAC Class of 2026 Executive, among others.

Her long-term goal is to take on management of the family farm.

"I wrote a scholarship application along with a resumé and cover letter, and sent it in. There were 75 applicants for the six scholarships," said Danen. "I definitely think they liked the fact I have been involved in the ag. industry in many different ways."

Danen said the animal side of agriculture is her top priority but realized she needs to have an overall understanding of the industry.

"I'm doing a mix of plant and animal courses, so I'm taking a wide range of classes. I am definitely more interested in the animal side, coming from a dairy farm, and it's more related to being on the family farm. I've also been enjoying my plant courses because crops come along with animals. After all, those animals need to be fed."

(PHOTO COURTESY OF ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE)

East Zorra-Tavistock resident and University of Guelph student Nicole Danen (far right in the front row) was recently awarded a $2,000 Ontario Federation of Agriculture scholarship to assist with her studies.

As it does in many sectors, technology plays a big part in day-to-day agricultural operations. Danen said while she isn't taking any tech-specific courses, she understands the need to keep up with the times.

"There are so many technological advances that are already here and are on the way. In the dairy sector, we have milking robots and automatic feed systems that are becoming more critical. We have two robots, a robotic-feed system and a robotic-feed pusher on our farm, so I have been able to see firsthand how they work."

Danen said once she graduates in the spring, she will head back to the family farm on the 16th Line. She also plans to do some travelling.

Five winners received OFA scholarships and one recipient was honoured with the new Peter Hannam Leadership Award during the OFA's annual general meeting in Toronto last week.

The OFA's longstanding scholarship program supports students pursuing agricultural studies at the undergraduate, postgraduate and apprenticeship levels. This year also marks the introduction of a new leadership award in memory of Peter Hannam, a respected industry leader, former OFA president and driving force behind the establishment of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program who passed away earlier this year. The award will recognize emerging leaders who embody his lifelong commitment to advancing Ontario agriculture.

"Peter Hannam's vision and leadership helped shape the future of Ontario agriculture in countless ways and continue to have an impact across the sector and beyond to this day," said Drew Spoelstra, OFA president.

"It's fitting that we honour his legacy with this new award while continuing to support and celebrate students who represent the next generation of the agriculture industry in our province."

Organizers request township annual funding renewal for Wellesley Fall Fair

Request comes during township's first budget meeting

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society, organizers of the annual Wellesley Township Fall Fair, has asked Wellesley council to consider reinstating annual funding support for the fair.

During the township's first budget meeting Nov. 27, agricultural society president Joanne Stewart and secretary-treasurer Mary Lichty-Neeb asked council to consider the request for the township to provide stable, predictable funding for the fair as it had in years past.

"As you know, earlier this month, we requested support for the 2025 fair and we're grateful to receive the $1,500. Again, thank you very much on behalf of the board," Stewart said. "Today, our focus is on how we can re-establish stable, ongoing township support as part of our yearly municipal budget. The Wellesley North Easthope Agricultural Society has been part of this community for 172 years. Throughout that time, we have adapted to meet the needs of our residents.

"While some traditions and elements have evolved, such as schools no longer receiving a fair day, our commitment to our youth engagement and agricultural education remains at the heart of our work. For the past 10 years, we've delivered a dairy education program welcoming local Grade 3 students to learn where their food comes from and how agriculture shapes their everyday lives. This year, we hosted over 2,200 students from across the township."

In addition to the dairy education program, Stewart said organizers added the educational AgriVenture Tent as a feature at this year's fall fair, giving residents and visitors another opportunity to learn, hands-on, about the importance of agriculture locally.

"For many years, the township generously contributed $1,500 to support our fair," Lichty-Neeb said. "In recent years, the funding has not been included in the budget, and without, it has become increasingly challenging for our volunteer-run organization to maintain the level of programming our residents have come to expect and enjoy.

"We deeply value our relationship with the township and recognize the many priorities you must balance. We welcome the opportunities for collaboration, alignment with the township goals, or participation in the broader community initiatives."

According to Lichty-Neeb, the cost to operate this year's fair was $45,000 with just $29,000 raised, leaving a funding gap the agricultural society needs to overcome to continue expanding the fair's educational programming without increasing the cost of admission.

Planning for next year's fair under a theme of "Farm to Feast" is already underway, and the agricultural society hopes to include an expanded AgriVenture Tent, a farm-safety education program for all public schools in the township next spring, increased involvement with the local 4-H clubs and dressage demonstrations.

Stewart and Lichty-Neeb asked council to consider either reinstating annual township support at $1,500 or increasing that support to an amount of council's choosing.

Wellesley councillors will have an opportunity to discuss the annual funding request at its next budget meeting on Dec. 4.

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

Theatre Wellesley's production of *The Curious Savage* draws a crowd despite winter weather

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Gazette Reporter

Theatre Wellesley's recent production of *The Curious Savage* by John Patrick drew large crowds despite the weather, bringing in more than 100 people to each performance.

Director Aidan Tessier said the show resonated with audiences in all the ways he had hoped, noting it delivered plenty of laughs along with more emotional moments.

"All of our fall shows up to this point have been pure farce, where comedy is the focus – high-energy laughs – whereas this one had a little more heart," he said. "It was primarily a comedy, but it had heartfelt moments. It had a slower pace with introspective parts mixed in. There were even some tears at the end."

Set in the 1950s, the play follows recently widowed Ethel Savage, played by Karen Reger, who decides to use her late husband's fortune to create a fund that helps people pursue their boldest dreams.

Her three stepchildren – U.S. Senator Titus (Al Cook), Judge Samuel (Ian Hopkins) and society socialite and serial bride Lily-Belle (Renee Murray) – want the inheritance for themselves. Determined to get control of the money, they commit her to The Cloisters, hoping to discover where she has hidden the fortune.

Inside the sanatorium, Ethel meets an eccentric but kind group of residents who prove to be far more grounded and compassionate than her own family. Through them, she learns that making the world a better place doesn't require wealth or power.

Tessier said the all-volunteer cast and crew connected strongly throughout the production, something he believes audiences could clearly see on stage.

"All the actors and all the backstage people had a blast together," he said.

Proceeds from concessions were donated to the Wellesley Community Food Cupboard. For information on upcoming shows, visit theatrewellesley.com.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

From left, Olivia Cook as Fairy May, Grant Chapman as Jeffrey, Ingrid Fast as Ethel Savage, Nathan Martin as Hannibal and Josie Willett as Florence take the stage at the recent Theatre Wellesley performance of *The Curious Savage*.

From left, Ingrid Fast as Ethel Savage, Ian Hopkins as Samuel Savage and Renee Murray as Lily Belle Savage didn't let the weather stop them in their outstanding performance this past weekend.

Taste of Ukraine brings community together in New Hamburg

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Gazette Reporter

The Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis group hosted one of its cultural gatherings at the Ukrainian Cultural Hub in New Hamburg last week.

The Taste of Ukraine event offered participants a chance to get hands-on in making a traditional dessert, Napoleon cake.

Napoleon cake has become one of Ukraine's most beloved celebration desserts. The multilayered pastry is said to trace its roots to the Russian Empire in the early 1900s, when bakers adapted the French millefeuille and named it Napoleon during the 100th anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat in 1812.

The cake later spread across the Soviet Union, where Ukrainian home cooks made it their own. Each region developed slight variations, often adding sour cream or sweetened condensed milk to the filling. Today, many Ukrainians see the dessert as a nostalgic symbol of hospitality and celebration, and it remains a fixture at birthdays, weddings and holiday tables.

These cultural nights, held throughout the month, are designed for Canadians who want to learn more about Ukrainian traditions and to share their own experiences with newcomers. The aim is to help connect people across Waterloo Region.

To learn more or to register, visit wrgrassrootsresponse.ca. Participation in all events is free, though donations are welcome.

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTOS)

Herb Goertz from Waterloo Region takes part in mixing the custard filling for the traditional Napoleon cake during a recent Taste of Ukraine gathering at the Cultural Hub in New Hamburg.

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Snow didn't stop W-ODSS students from delivering exceptional performance last weekend

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Gazette Reporter

Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School (W-ODSS) has wrapped up its fall production of *Silver Dagger* by David French.

Despite Friday night's performance being cancelled due to weather, Alecia Sparks, director and W-ODSS drama teacher, said the community showed strong support during Saturday's matinee and evening shows, where students performed in front of nearly sold-out audiences.

"We didn't let the snow stop us," said Sparks. "The cast and crew both did a phenomenal job on both our matinee and our evening performances on Saturday. Several audience members were really impressed with the actors' memorization of the complex dialogue."

Audience feedback praised the students' strong memorization, the functional set design and the collaborative effort behind the scenes.

Sparks noted they received many compliments on the set, which was built by students in a construction class. The performances drew friends, family, students and even staff and teachers from other schools within the Waterloo Region District School Board.

Sophie Ernewein, a Grade 10 student who played Pamela Marsh, said her role pushed her out of her comfort zone and made her become a better actor.

"This is my second play," she said. "Last year, I was Ari, and this year was one of the biggest roles I've ever done. It was a challenge because I went from a very shy character to a very confident character, so this performance tested my abilities and made me a stronger actress."

Ella Jones, the Grade 11 stage manager, said she valued the opportunity to support younger students and work with multiple departments.

"It's great to work with younger students who look up to you," she said. "I love all the younger students so much. I really appreciate them looking up to me in that way and being able to guide them."

Jones added she was proud of how the performance came together, crediting actors, tech crew and set-design teams.

"All our actors did an amazing job and everybody backstage, including tech and set design, did an amazing job," she said.

Huxley Morton offered emotional praise to the cast and crew after Saturday's final show.

"I struggle to find words to describe the immense level of effort each and every one of you, from our crew to classes, staff members and cast, has placed into this performance," he told the team. "The bar we set out to reach was high, and yet, through your resilience, we've managed to make it through our final show. I couldn't be more impressed by your resolve, nor more grateful for your contribution."

Sparks also thanked the school's administration team – including Mr. David Linnerth, Mr. Aaron Holmes and Ms. Emily Campbell – along with staff and community members who supported the production.

"It was really nice to see the support from the community," she said. "We had a mixture of friends and family, lots of students and a few guests from other schools, as well as staff from the Waterloo Region District school board who came out to support our students."

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Alex Ottoson (Steve Marsh), Phoenix Charland (Tony Bishop) and Sophie Ernewein (Pamela Marsh) perform during Saturday's performance at Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School's production of *Silver Dagger*.

Cast members Jonathan Roussel (Jon Talbot), Phoenix Charland (Tony Bishop), Alex Ottoson (Steve Marsh), Sophie Ernewein (Pamela Marsh), Camille Cressman (Christine Dodd) and Olivia Logan (Gemma Dodd) take their curtain call after the W-ODSS performance of *Silver Dagger*.

W-ODSS is now preparing for its spring show, which will feature student-written productions. More details will be shared later in the school year.

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Getting their Christmas tree picked out early in Tavistock

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Kelly and Cory Robinson were among the first to pick out their Christmas tree this year, deciding an early start was the best way to get into the holiday spirit, and to take advantage of the best selection.

The Tavistock couple said the Balsam Firs offered by the Middle Aged Pews group from Grace United Church are "the best yet," praising both the quality and the price. At $65, they said it's the best buy around for a full-sized, fresh-cut tree, and supporting a local community group makes the purchase even better.

As the snow began to blow in, Kelly Robinson said choosing their tree is always an exciting moment.

"It's the first sign the holidays are really here. Nothing beats the smell of a real Christmas tree in the house."

Sales continue at the home of Beth and Mike Kaufman on William Street North, where the trees are set up in the front and side yard even as winter delivered its first blast of the season with nearly 50 centimetres of fresh snow.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Kelly and Cory Robinson shake off the snow while searching for the perfect Christmas tree at the Kaufman home on William Street North, where Grace United Church's Middle Aged Pews group continues its annual Balsam Fir sale.

Christmas lights are shining in Shakespeare

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The home of Heather and Lennie Schoonderwoerd on Byron Street is lighting up the village with a festive display that shifts through a full spectrum of colours each evening. During the Blue Jays' playoff run, the house stayed lit in blue to show support; now it glows in every colour of the rainbow through the Christmas season.

Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation recruiting new board members

SPCCF needs four to six board members to help with philanthropic giving

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation (SPCCF), an organization dedicated to philanthropic giving and serving as the steward of funds earmarked for local charitable causes, is looking for new board members to support its mission across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County.

For more than 20 years, the SPCCF has supported charitable organizations through grants made possible by the responsible management of endowment funds. As the foundation continues to evolve to meet emerging needs, the board is looking for people who bring insight from community involvement, hands-on experience and a willingness to think creatively about local challenges and opportunities.

"We're really open to four to six (new board members) at this time, and actually, if we have candidates who are really qualified, it could be more than that," said Lee Anne Andriessen, a director on the SPCCF board and chair of the governance and nominations committee. "We do have some retiring directors, so we're trying to stay ahead of the game in terms of being prepared that way. We're actually operating at a minimum amount of directors and we'd like to get into a higher number. Sadly, one of our directors passed away in July – Don Hathaway passed away – so we were really sad about that.

"Typically, directors are at that retirement age and everyone takes on so much to some degree. A lot of them have already given three to four years, so it's fair when people want to move on to other things."

SPCCF board members are volunteers and they typically meet six to 10 times annually, though Andriessen says participation goes beyond the boardroom as she and her fellow members serve on committees of the board, attend funding announcements and other events, and work within their own community connections to identify potential donors, as well as charities and other organizations that could benefit from the funding SPCCF has available.

Andriesssen said the board is seeking members with experience that complements the work SPCCF does, whether that's legal, insurance, finance, or business, experience working with charities and non-profit organizations, a background in long-term planning, policy development and governance, community leadership, and everything in between. While she says candidates are not required to demonstrate experience in all of these sectors, the board is looking to build a team in which each if its members bring something different to the table.

"We're also looking for people who have their finger on the pulse of the community and what our needs are because our foundation gives money away – we grant out money," Andriessen said, noting SPCCF manages and grows funds totalling $10 million. "So, it would be nice to know, from other people's perspective, what is top of mind. Is it housing, is it food security, is it youth? … Some people who work in different aspects of community life have a really good way of drilling down into what's needed."

While Andriessen says it can be easy to find potential board members in Stratford, she's hoping to see applicants from both St. Marys and across Perth County.

"It is a county foundation that actually allocates money across the county, from North Perth to St. Marys, Perth East, Perth South, West Perth," she said. "We need to have voices from all those corners because when you have voices from all those corners, you have a better sense of what are those needs, and also knowing people who can contribute to foundation financially, too."

Interested applicants are being asked to fill out an online application form at spccf.ca before 5 p.m. Jan. 5, 2026, and selected candidates will be contacted for an interview.

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Sprucewood Tack sets up new shop in downtown Tavistock

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

From humble beginnings in 1987, Sprucewood Tack has grown to become southwestern Ontario's largest retailer of quality equestrian equipment and apparel. Now, they have the most visible retail operation anywhere in East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT).

The Ropp family recently moved the business from the family farm just outside of town to the former Somers Generators facility at 101 Woodstock St. S in the heart of Tavistock. There is also a second location in Arva, located on Richmond Street. The ownership group consists of Heather Ropp, her husband, Dennis Ropp, son Nathan Ropp, and his wife, Sarah Ropp.

"I started it on the farm to service a small area. We didn't have any tack shops around, so people pretty much had to go to Toronto to get any equipment," said Heather Ropp. "There was a big barn on Highway 7 and 8 that had 150 students at that time, and they needed somewhere to buy helmets, boots, those kinds of things. It's just kind of grown from there."

The Arva store was opened in 1995 and there have been a few expansions on the farm over the years to respond to growing demand. That growth included shipping containers to hold stock. Due to the store's remote location, Sprucewood's online presence has helped grow the business to where it is today.

"We are a niche within a niche," said Sarah Ropp. "The majority of our products are for hunter jumpers and dressage. We have a lot of higher-end Italian and French products for the Toronto market, but we also have products for beginners and intermediate riders at a lower price point."

(LEE GRIFFI PHOTOS)

Sprucewood's ownership group poses in front of the boot section of its new retail store. From left to right are Sarah and Nathan Ropp, and Heather and Dennis Ropp.

The business has decided to carry a variety of other products, including well-known clothing and boot lines. They are also now stocking Oakley and Ray-Ban sunglasses.

"We have popular brands of jeans and tops as well as Blundstone and Kamik boots. Kamik is a Canadian company and you used to be able to find them everywhere," Sarah Ropp added. "We're not going to carry every popular brand, but if there's a story behind it and something fun behind it, it matches with our brand."

The store also stocks pyjamas, pet supplies and food, as well as children's toys, along with coveralls made specifically for women. Sprucewood's customers come from all parts of Ontario as well as the United States, and they also keep busy in the summer by setting up shop at horse shows across the province. It employs as many as 25 people during the busy season and close to 20 otherwise.

Sarah Ropp says most locals always thought the tack shop was a small, rural operation that caters to people in the area, something that couldn't be further from the truth.

"I think that was the general consensus, just not necessarily in the equestrian world. Tavistock thought we were a small business, and our customers, who had never been to the store, were very surprised by what they saw because it wasn't the brand we put out at the shows or online," she said.

Nathan Ropp became a part of the business about 10 years ago as Dennis Ropp decreased his involvement. Heather Ropp said a big part of his role is custom saddle fitting.

"He did some training in England and Italy. He's very observant and has a natural talent for fitting," she said.

Each horse is different when it comes to finding the right saddle, so Sprucewood carries several lines to ensure the proper fit.

"If a brand doesn't work for your horse, we aren't trying to make it work for your horse. We find one that works right away," Heather Ropp added.

Depending on the brand and level of customization, saddle prices can run anywhere from $2,000 to over $10,000 for the highest-end options.

As for the future of the business, the owners say the new building gives them a lot of potential.

"That was why Nathan and I liked this building," said Sarah Ropp. "We can do whatever we want here; it's a wide-open canvas. Nathan is a bit of a dreamer in a good way. He has a lot of great ideas and he gets us where we need to go."

As the owners searched for a new location, the most important part of the exercise was to stay local.

"It was a definite choice to stay in Tavistock. Realistically, this store should be outside of Toronto in horse country, and that's an option, to have other stores elsewhere. We raised our kids here, Sarah and Nathan's kids go to Tavistock Public School. This is where we want to be," Heather Ropp said.

They also want to continue to help Tavistock grow as a destination where people can shop at the store and enjoy what else the town has to offer.

"We track where our customers come from, and the number of out-of-region visitors on the home farm was huge. We encouraged people to head into town to have lunch. Even people going to the Stratford Festival normally wouldn't come through Tavistock, but they come to see us. I think it will be good for everybody," said Sarah Ropp.

The business recently purchased and moved to the former Somers Generator building in the heart of Tavistock.

Sidewalk clearing in Shakespeare keeps pedestrians safe after weekend snowfall

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

After two straight days of heavy snowfall, sidewalks in Shakespeare were quickly made safe again thanks to the steady work of Perth East operator Scott Pettapiece.

Pettapiece was out through the weekend clearing walkways with the municipal sidewalk blower, ensuring residents had safe footing despite the early-season blast of winter. He says he's normally behind the wheel of a plow truck, but with accumulating snow across Perth East, he's also putting in long hours on sidewalk duty in several communities.

Pedestrians have been grateful. The blower strips snow and ice right down to the cement, preventing the slippery, uneven conditions that often make winter walking dangerous.

Keeping sidewalks clear and salted when needed is a priority for Pettapiece, who lives in Monkton, and for Perth East staff as they work to stay ahead of changing winter weather.

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Perth East operator Scott Pettapiece works long hours to keep sidewalks cleared and safe in all towns and villages across the municipality, salting walkways when necessary.

Kirsten Dill recognized with new Gay Lea volunteer award for outstanding 4-H service

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

A well-known and highly committed 4-H volunteer from North Easthope Township has been honoured for her dedication to local and district clubs.

Kirsten Dill, who lives near Hampstead with her family, was recently presented with the new Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Volunteer Award recognizing her years of service and her deep passion for the 4-H program.

Dill's connection to 4-H goes back to her own youth. She remembers taking part in projects at the former Shakespeare firehall with longtime leader Dianne Gottschalk. Sewing, Milk Makes It Better and the Chicken and Egg project were among her favourites, and she credits many local leaders for shaping the person she is today.

Her return to 4-H began in 2017 when her oldest daughter, Jade, joined her first club. Watching her daughter learn and grow inspired Dill to get involved again, not only as a supporter but as a leader.

That opportunity came when Tavistock dairy farmer and 4-H leader Jack Danen asked her to consider joining the Oxford County 4-H board. She accepted and, over the past five years, has become an essential part of the county program. She now assists with numerous projects, serves as assistant secretary and associate representative for Oxford County 4-H, and plans to launch a new project in 2026.

Dill has also coached teams in the popular Go for the Gold competition, helping members develop their confidence and skills. She says the hands-on learning model of 4-H – "Learn to do by Doing" – continues to motivate her.

"The benefits this program offers are incredible," she said. "I feel very honoured to receive the 4-H Ontario New Leader Award for Region 6. It was such a welcome surprise."

All three of her children are now active 4-H members, attending camps and conferences and earning awards and scholarships of their own. Dill says she believes strongly in the accessibility of 4-H.

"It's for everyone, no matter your background, where you live, or your culture," she said. "There is something for every young person in this program."

Known for her enthusiasm, organization and willingness to help anyone who asks, Dill has become a highly respected volunteer in the Oxford County 4-H community who continues to give back generously.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

The Dill family of Hampstead. From left: Mike, Kirsten, Jade, Lexi and Levi Dill.

From left, Gay Lea representative Steve Veldman, award recipient Kirsten Dill and Christine Oldfield of 4-H Ontario, following the presentation of the Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Volunteer Award.

TOWNSHIP OF Wilmot

NOTICE OF PASSING OF INTERIM CONTROL BY-LAW

In accordance with Section 38 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, Council of the Corporation of the Township of Wilmot passed By-law 2025-75 on November 24, 2025.

By-law 2025-75 applies to all lands within the Township of Wilmot that are zoned Zone 12 (Institutional). The by-law prohibits any use on properties zoned Zone 12 that involve human habitation. The by-law does not apply to uses that are already occurring or for which a building permit has been issued.

The by-law has been passed for a period of one year as the Township develops policies regarding housing and servicing within its new Official Plan and that will inform updates to the zoning by-law and specifically Zone 12. Council of the Township of Wilmot has the authority to extend the period during which the by-law will be in effect to a total period not exceeding two years.

The last day for filing a notice of appeal is 4:30pm on January 13, 2026. The notice of appeal must be received by the Clerk of the Township of Wilmot, must set out reasons for the appeal, and be accompanied by the fee required by the Ontario Land Tribunal. More information on the appeal process can be found on the Tribunal's website: https://staging-oltontario.kinsta.cloud/file-an-appeal/.

For more information about By-law 2025-75, please contact the Development Services Department, Planning Division: planning@wilmot.ca, 519-634-8444 or visit the Township Administration Complex, 60 Snyder's Road West, Baden.

The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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Journey to the Stable brings Christmas story to life at Grace United

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The grounds of Grace United Church in Tavistock were transformed into Bethlehem on the weekend as volunteers staged Journey to the Stable, an outdoor retelling of the birth of Jesus that drew more than 100 visitors.

The production featured three 20-minute performances, and included live animals, costumed actors of all ages and interactive scenes that invited audiences to walk alongside the shepherds on their way to the manger.

Participants followed the shepherds across the church property, stopping at various stations before reaching the stable where Joseph and Mary awaited the birth of the Christ child.

The play was written and directed by Grace United's youth coordinator, Carol Young, whose work was warmly received by those in attendance. Many commented on how meaningful it was to experience the nativity story outdoors in a way that captured the spirit and simplicity of the first Christmas.

Organizers say they hope to bring Journey to the Stable back next year as a continuing reminder of the season's true meaning.

Women sorting grain along the journey to the stable, from left, include Cathy Glaab, Annalise Glaab and Teagan Glaab.

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Angels on high, from left, are Ava Cook, Lucia Bean, Farrah Bean, Joanne Bean and Blakely Griffi.

Shepherds watching their sheep, from left, are Mary Ann Krantz and Connor Shantz.

At the well in Bethlehem, from left, are Kirsten Smythe, Marianne Ruby and Jenn Stevely.

Joseph and Mary with baby Jesus in the manger, from left, are Bill and Billie Ross.

One Night Stand All-Star Band raises $7,800 for House of Friendship

PAUL KNOWLES

Gazette Contributor

A group of musicians who had never played together before performed in concert last week at an event that raised funds for House of Friendship, the Waterloo Region charity that provides a wide variety of services to those in need of assistance in the community.

The One Night Stand All-Star Band was in concert on Nov. 23 in front of an audience of more than 110 at Foxboro Green.

The band included Neil Murray (of the Neil Murray Band and music director at Parkminster United Church in Waterloo), Junior Riggan (frequently a band member in Drayton Festival productions), Dean Djako and Jeff Walsh (of the band, And Then There Were Two), and Paul Knowles (known for The River Rolls and also the travel feature writer for this newspaper).

The event raised $7,800 for House of Friendship.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL KNOWLES)

The One Night Stand All-Star Band included, from right, Jeff Walsh, Neil Murray, Dean Djako, Junior Riggan and Paul Knowles.

A Christmas tradition lives on at the Red Shed

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

St. James Perth East held its Christmas play in the Red Shed beside the church on Saturday, Nov. 29.

This annual tradition that has warmed hearts for 28 years was first started by Sharon Lindner. The event continues each year thanks to the dedication of organizer Carol Horst and a faithful group of neighbourhood volunteers.

The play, Journey to Bethlehem, is a traditional retelling of the Christmas story told in a unique way. A grandmother and grandfather sit on the corner of the stage, telling the story to their grandchild. As they speak, actors bring the story to life playing Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, angels and wise men.

Live animals are a big part of this event. Cats, rabbits, ducks and chickens, along with a pony, ewe and lamb, a goat, and a donkey fill the Red Shed and bring it to life. These animals bring plenty of surprises each year, from a mama sheep calling to her lamb to a goat adding its own voice during a song. The camels, played by children in costume, are always a crowd favourite.

Preparation for this long-running event is kept simple with one planning meeting and one dress rehearsal. While many participants "know the drill" after nearly three decades, Horst still does a great deal of work behind the scenes to bring it all together. The play is part of St. James' outreach to the community.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Children from the audience join the Angel Choir on stage during the play, Journey to Bethlehem.

Home Hardware donates the sound system. Donations are always welcome to help cover costs such as refreshments, and any profit is donated to SickKids.

Each year brings many newcomers to the audience, and with two performances at 4 and 7 p.m., every show feels a little different thanks to the children and animals who always add surprises. The evening performance is magical once darkness falls and the lights glow around the stage. Each show draws about 100 people.

This year's program included a solo by Betty Slothouber and "Jesus Loves Me" by the children's choir. Children from the audience were invited to join the angel choir on stage to sing along, while the audience was invited to sing Christmas carols along with the adult choir.

This long-loved tradition is now ready to welcome its third generation of participants. Many of the children who once appeared in the original cast, some even playing camels, are now adults and preparing to pass the tradition on to their own children. Journey to Bethlehem has truly become a cherished event that marks the beginning of the Christmas season for many.

Nith Valley Mennonite Church celebrates 50 years of worship and fellowship

GREG YANTZI

Gazette Contributor

A celebration 50 years in the making took place at Nith Valley Mennonite Church on Sept. 28.

The day was filled with thanksgiving and inspiration as more than 140 people from the congregation's past and present gathered for worship, fellowship and food. Nith Valley was born out of the amalgamation of Biehn and Blenheim Mennonite churches – two small congregations that recognized working together provided an opportunity for creating something new.

The morning service featured songs from a women's ensemble and a slideshow looking back at the people and activities from five decades of ministry. Rick Cober Bauman was the guest speaker, son of the congregation's first pastor, the late Gordon Bauman. Rick Bauman's mother, Erma Bauman, was easily the oldest person present at age 97.

Rick Bauman challenged the congregation using 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23 and the words, "Don't Quench the Spirit," in light of current challenging times of transition for many faith communities. Rick Bauman reflected on the current church climate in Canada which might create anxiety for us as we try to preserve what we have. But he reminded everyone that God's spirit is always at work and our need to be in control certainly does not further the work of the church.

Our Anabaptist faith and lifestyle that reflects Paul's invitation is something the world wants and needs right now; live at peace with one another, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone and pray without ceasing. A fitting reminder of what the church can be now and for years to come.

The spectacular weather allowed for an outdoor, large group photo to end the time of worship but not before a time capsule from 1986 was opened to provide a glimpse into the congregation's history. New items will be added to an updated time capsule featuring current news and marking the Anabaptism at 500 celebration in Zurich. Photos and artifacts were displayed, looking back at 50 years of ministry and congregational life. The celebration concluded with a catered lunch and cake, of course!

The day was filled with much rejoicing for the many years that God has been present in the life of the congregation and through the movement of the spirit through which relationships and faith have flourished. May the challenges of the next 50 years provide an abundance of opportunities for faith to be nurtured and the love of God be expressed so that God's healing and hope might flow through us into the world!

(MARION SHANTZ PHOTO)

Pictured on top is a photo from 1975 featuring representatives of the Biehn and Blenheim congregations joining to form the Nith Valley Mennonite Church. From left to right are Clayton Cressman, Gordon Bauman and Ken Cressman. Pictured on the bottom is a remake of the same photo at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Nith Valley Mennonite Church with the sons of the men in the 1975 photo. From left to right are Ralph Cressman, Rick Cober Bauman and Kevin Cressman.

This is Doug.

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OBITUARY

WAGLER, Susan "Sue" Elizabeth

Passed away peacefully with her family by her side on Sunday, November 23, 2025, at Groves Memorial Community Hospital, Fergus. Sue was born 68 years ago, a daughter of the late George and Esther (Shelley) Penney.

Devoted and loving wife of Edward Wagler whom she cherished 48 years of marriage with. Cherished mother of Amanda Wagler and husband Kyle Dietrich, Meghan Wagler, and Stephanie Wagler and husband Jesse Cressman. Sue was a doting grammy to Maren, Harrison, Mayelle, Camille, Ezra, and Wilson. She will be fondly remembered by her sister Louise Gingerich, brother Mike Penney and wife Ellen, and by her multiple brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, nieces and nephews. Sue will also be missed by her elderly dog Stew.

Sue made friends everywhere she went and will be missed and remembered by her many friends, neighbours, fellow volunteers at MCC Thrift – New Hamburg, her pickleball family and by her Wilmot Mennonite Church family. Sue was employed with Hybrid Turkeys for 30 years.

At Sue's request, cremation has taken place. Relatives and friends are invited to Wilmot Mennonite Church, 2995 Bleams Rd, New Hamburg, on Saturday, January 3, 2026, for a memorial service beginning at 11:00 a.m. with Pastor Susan Allison Jones officiating. A reception will follow at the Puddicombe House, New Hamburg. For those unable to attend the reception, the family will receive at the church beginning at 10:00 a.m. until the time of the service.

As expressions of sympathy, memorial donations can be made to Groves Memorial Community Hospital, or the WRHN Cancer Centre and can be done on the funeral home website.

Personal condolences can be posted for the family at www.markjutzifuneralhomes.ca

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the Mark Jutzi Funeral Home, New Hamburg.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

IN MEMORIAM

IN LOVING *Memory*

Elizabeth Jutzi

FEBRUARY 23, 1984 - DECEMBER 4, 2020

Remembering our beautiful, sweet, happy Beth, who left us so unexpectedly 5 years ago.

So dearly loved and missed.
Stew, Cindy
Rachel, Daniel, Josh and Lindsay

Futher-Franklin Funeral Home Ltd.

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Wellesley, Ontario. N0B 2T0
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chris@futher-franklinfuneralhome.com
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Christopher W. Franklin
Funeral Director

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette Weekly Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. How many times does the International Space Station orbit the Earth each day?
2. Which Allied codebreaking center famously cracked the German Enigma cipher during World War II?
3. What is Tungsten also known as?
4. True or False. Most of the dust in your home is made of human skin.
5. "The Mighty Ducks" movie and the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim NHL expansion team, both debuted in what year?
6. What is the capital of British Columbia?
7. What is currently the safest country in the world?
8. Tony the Tiger is featured on what cereal brand?
9. How often do your taste buds regenerate on average?
10. What is the most flexible muscle in the human body?

Answers found on the classified page

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Tavistock
D&D Homestyle Cuisine, Tim Hortons, Hasty Market, Sam's Independent
Quehl's Restaurant, IDA Pharmacy, Shell Gas, Library, Tavistock Arena, Scotia Bank

Baden
Tim Hortons, Circle K, Subway, Mars Variety, Baden Coffee Company, Pharmacy in Baden Plaza

New Dundee
New Dundee Village Market

Wellesley
Pym's, Schmidt's Bulk Pantry, Cook's Pharmacy
Schmidtsville Restaurant, Wellesley Service

Shakespeare
Shakespeare Brewery, Shakespeare Variety, Shakespeare Pies

St. Agatha
Pfennings Store, Hasty Market

Petersburg
Petro Canada Gas Bar

Stratford
Food Basics, Sobeys, No Frills, Klomps Home & Garden

SUDOKU

by PeterS 2025

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ANSWERS FOUND ON THE CLASSIFIED PAGE

The Old Gazettes

By Stewart Grant

Slowly but surely, I'm reading through the past pages of the Tavistock Gazette (est. 1895). Within this weekly column I'd like to share with you some of my findings.

December 2-9, 2015, Edition (10 years ago)

The ground was clear and the weather was crisp and cold as hundreds of people lined the streets on Saturday, Nov. 28 for the annual Santa Claus Parade sponsored by the Tavistock Men's Club. Receiving first prize for their commercial entry was CIBC Tavistock Branch with Santa's workshop. In the organizations category, Tavistock Assistance Program earned first prize with their float of elves waiting for Santa to come down the chimney. First place in the family category went to the Armstrongs for their group of half lingers.

Grade 7 students Teresa "Gogo" Curley, 13, and Ruth Jaw, 12, are attending Northwestern Secondary School in Stratford this school year after their school burnt to the ground in Cape Dorset, Nunavut. They are being hosted locally by the Houle family of Tavistock.

Students at Tavistock Public School will now have colourful, reusable cups for their nutrition program thanks to the generosity of the Optimist Club of Tavistock. First vice president Grant Meadows made the delivery of 330 plastic cups last week to nutrition program coordinator Sara Ropp who was thrilled at the donation.

December 4-11, 1985, Edition (40 years ago)

It was a day of joy and a day of sadness; an hour of tumultuous rejoicing and an hour of quiet reflection; a gathering of solemnity as well as humour. This and so many more feelings were expressed Sunday, Dec. 1, when close to 600 people assembled at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sebastopol, to honour retiring Pastor Forrest R. Mosher after 32 years in service to the congregation and community.

Santa and Mrs. Claus were the main attraction at Saturday's Santa Claus Parade in Tavistock. Some 510 bags of candy were distributed to the good boys and girls by the jolly couple, compliments of the Tavistock Men's Club and board of trade.

It was a virtual beehive at the post office last Friday morning when the Grade 1 class of Mrs. Snyder and the Grade 1/2 of Ms. Horvath of the Tavistock Public School descended on the post office to decorate a Christmas Tree and then, in the afternoon, several students of Grade 8 classes of Mr. Becker and Mr. McIntyre visited to decorate the windows with Christmas scenes.

Tavistock's new postmaster says she enjoys the village so much, she would like to stay forever. Laureena Smith of Port Burwell, Ont., took up the position at the local office recently and is very pleased with the hometown feeling she gets.

December 3-10, 1975, Edition (50 years ago)

Lt.-Gov. Pauline McGibbon presented a specially designed Ontario pin made from silver and amethyst to Jean Milne Watson of Innerkip at a dinner in Toronto honouring Ontario's 25 outstanding women.

The Tavistock Public School Boys Volleyball team captured the championship for "B" schools at a tournament held at Huron Park Secondary School, Woodstock, on Saturday, Nov. 22. Members of the team are David Pellow, Larry Mutch, Mark Seltzer, Dyon Mitchell, John Wittig, Greg Sharp, Philip Ruby and Maynard Yantzi.

Zorra Highland Bus Lines of Embro had their inaugural run from Embro to Stratford via Hickson, Tavistock and Harmony last Friday. A schedule of bus times is posted with rates in the municipal office in Tavistock and, until further notice, will be a weekly service on Fridays.

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Pastor Julie Ellison White
131 Wettlaufer St., Tavistock 655-2581
Sunday Worship services begin at 9:45am, with coffee and fellowship to follow at 11am.
All ages Junior Sunday School will follow after the service.
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Please join us for Advent & Christmas!
December 7 @ 10:15am - Second Sunday of Advent
December 14 @ 10:15am - Third Sunday of Advent
December 14 @ 7:00pm - Nine Lessons & Carols with fellowship and refreshments
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December 24 @ 6:30pm - Hymn Sing
December 24 @ 7:00pm - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette SPORTS

PJHL Roundup: Applejacks fighting with Navy Vets for top spot

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Correspondent

Wellesley only had one game over the weekend but picked up a valuable win to move two points back of first-place Woodstock in the Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL) standings.

Xavier Bussiere stopped all 32 shots he faced to earn his first shutout of the season. Rhys McCloskey's sixth goal of the season just two minutes into the opening period hung on as the game-winner. The next two goals were into an empty net as the Shamrocks pulled their goalie. Hudson Parker and Tyson Chadwick found the back of the net as Wellesley earned its fifth in a row and haven't lost since dropping a 4-2 decision to Tavistock on Nov. 12.

New Hamburg also played just one game last weekend, coming away with a 4-2 victory at home against Paris on Friday despite being outshot 44-31. The Firebirds had 10 skaters pick up a single point with Owen Sculthorp, Aydan Burns, Carter Niall and Jayden Fischer finding the back of the Titans' net. Deklan Jermol was sharp for New Hamburg, kicking out 42 shots for his seventh win of the season.

A poor second period hurt Tavistock in a 5-2 loss to visiting Woodstock on Friday night. Even Palubeski gave the Braves a 1-0 lead with a powerplay marker just past the halfway point of the first period but the Navy Vets stormed back with three straight goals in the second period to take a 3-1 lead into the third. Palubeski pulled Tavistock to within one with his second of the game and 13th of the season two minutes into the final frame, but Woodstock scored twice in the final three and a half minutes to take the two points. Yann Raskin had a pair of assists in a losing effort and the Braves outshot the Vets 43-31.

Tavistock was hoping to bounce back in Paris on Saturday but dropped a 6-5 decision, the team's third straight defeat. Newly signed Ethan Stover led Tavistock with a goal and three assists while Yann Raskin and Ryan McKellar added a goal and assist each. The Titans led 1-0 after the first and 3-2 after 40 minutes. Paris scored twice in the first eight minutes of the third to take a 5-2 lead before Tavistock cut the lead to 5-4 with three and a half minutes remaining, but the teams traded goals over the last two minutes.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Tucker Otto skates away after a goal-mouth battle took Kobe Nadalin's net out of place during the Tavistock Braves' 5-2 loss to the Woodstock Navy Vets on Nov. 28.

Stover, a Waterloo native, was acquired from the Ayr Centennials of the Great Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) where he spent three full seasons and parts of two others. The forward was also team captain and had 10 points in 25 games.

Tavistock general manager Brent Lange said he is extremely excited to bring in a veteran Junior B player like Stover whose junior career would have come to an end had he remained in Ayr for the entire season.

"With Ethan being 20 this year, we can have him this year and next, and we are thrilled to bring him in. It is a bit tricky as there are certain dates we have to follow, so the deal had to be done by Dec. 1. He provides us with great depth up the middle and wing if needed. He is a great leader and a two-way forward who brings grit, compete level and will fit in nicely here, and will be a fan favourite very quickly here."

Stover will see action on both special teams units and has already paid dividends with five points in his first two games.

The Centennials went through a team tragedy in 2022 when then captain Eli Palfreyman collapsed in the locker room during the second intermission of a pre-season game. Emergency personnel were called, and he was transported to Cambridge Memorial Hospital but died a short time later at the age of 20. The family later confirmed Palfreyman died of a medical incident related to a previously undetected heart condition.

"A nice touching thing he did to pay tribute to his late friend and former teammate was asking to wear number 17 for us, as that was the number Eli wore in Ayr with him. We were definitely going to make sure we could make that happen for him," said Lange.

The Braves also acquired a defenceman this week as Stratford native Nathan Siebert has joined the team.

"He is another great add for us and I was trying to get him to come here in the spring. But, in his first year at Laurier this year, he wasn't sure if he could manage both schedules. We had been in touch a few times in the last month or two and it finally worked out to bring him in," said Lange.

Siebert was the captain of the Stratford Warriors U18 AA team last year and led his team to an Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF) Championship. He also scored the game-winning goal in the championship game.

"He is a great young D-man, he sees the ice very well and is a great skater and can play a physical game as well as contribute on the scoreboard. He will be a welcome addition on the back end," said Lange.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK BRAVES)

Tavistock acquired former Ayr Centennials captain Ethan Stover who picked up five points in his first two games with the Braves.

PJHL CURRENT STANDINGS

	South Doherty Division	GP	W	L	OTL	T	SOW	SOL	PTS	OTW	GF	GA	DIFF	PCT	PCT	PIM	RW	ROW	STK	IN-DIV	GPCT
1	Woodstock Navy Vets	23	15	4	3	0	0	1	34	2	98	60	38	0.739	0.000	370	13	15	9-0-1-1	0-0-0-0	0.620
2	Wellesley Applejacks	22	16	6	0	0	0	0	32	5	95	73	22	0.727	0.000	419	11	16	5-0-0-0	0-0-0-0	0.565
3	New Hamburg Firebirds	20	11	5	4	0	0	0	26	1	76	63	13	0.650	0.000	415	10	11	2-0-0-0	0-0-0-0	0.547
4	Tavistock Braves	21	12	8	1	0	0	0	25	1	83	72	11	0.595	0.000	414	11	12	0-3-0-0	0-0-0-0	0.535
5	Norwich Merchants	21	10	8	2	0	0	1	23	4	65	72	-7	0.548	0.000	330	6	10	1-0-1-0	0-0-0-0	0.474
6	Hespeler Shamrocks	21	9	10	2	0	2	0	20	3	41	72	-31	0.476	0.000	449	4	7	0-1-0-0	0-0-0-0	0.363
7	Paris Titans	22	7	12	3	0	0	0	17	1	80	107	-27	0.386	0.000	345	6	7	1-0-0-0	0-0-0-0	0.428
8	Dorchester Dolphins	22	6	12	3	0	1	1	16	1	72	91	-19	0.364	0.000	345	4	5	0-2-1-0	0-0-0-0	0.442

Braves closing in on first place as momentum builds

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Tavistock Braves players were all smiles as they mingled with the crowd during this year's Santa Claus parade, greeting fans who have been cheering them through an impressive start to the season.

The Braves are only a few points out of first place in their division, and players say the support they feel on Friday nights at the arena has played a big role in their momentum.

They're hoping that continues.

"Local fan support does wonders for their confidence," said coaches and players throughout the afternoon, noting the energy from the stands often shows up on the scoreboard.

Parade-goers returned the enthusiasm, joining together in chants of "Go Braves Go" as the team passed by.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Braves players greeting fans at the parade included, from left, Lucas Hicks, Marc Dionne (C), Carson Bernhardt (A), Blake Richard, Andrew Torchia, Carter Otto, Keaton Bartlett (A), Henry Kotyk, Brett Bell and Carter Arseneau (A).

An ice rink in Shakespeare is ready – now it just needs the cold

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

A backyard rink on Galt Street in Shakespeare is only waiting on freezing temperatures before it becomes one of the busiest spots in the neighbourhood.

Jeff Fuhr, a carpenter by trade, has been building and maintaining one of the area's best backyard rinks for several years. Each winter, he transforms his yard into a full-size skating surface for his children and their friends, complete with boards, a plastic liner and lights for evening hockey practice.

Earlier this week, a water tanker finished flooding the rink for the first time this season. Now, the Fuhr family – along with plenty of friends and neighbours – are watching the forecast closely, eager for temperatures to drop so they can lace up for another winter of skating and Canada's favourite pastime.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A backyard rink on Galt Street in Shakespeare, built and maintained by the Fuhr family, stands ready for freezing temperatures to turn it into one of the area's most popular winter hangouts.

CURRENT ONTARIO ELITE HOCKEY LEAGUE SOUTH CONFERENCE STANDINGS

RK	TEAM	GP	W	L	T	OTW	OTL	SOW	SOL	PTS	P%	RW	ROW	GF	GA	DIFF	STK	PIM	PPO	PPG	SHGA	PP%	TSH	SHG	PPGA	PK%
1	Seaforth Centenaires	11	9	2	0	1	0	1	0	18	.818	7	8	55	26	29	Won 4	163	40	5	2	0.125	37	1	3	0.919
2	Elora Rocks	9	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	14	.778	7	7	55	27	28	Won 5	83	35	8	2	0.229	21	0	2	0.905
3	Petrolia Squires	9	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	14	.778	7	7	45	22	23	Won 1	135	27	7	0	0.259	36	2	2	0.944
4	Dunnville Aeros	10	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	10	.500	5	5	55	43	12	Lost 1	173	43	10	0	0.233	37	3	8	0.784
5	Erin Outlaws	7	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	.714	5	5	32	22	10	Lost 1	132	22	4	0	0.182	38	1	6	0.842
6	Tavistock Royals	9	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	10	.556	5	5	41	36	5	Lost 3	118	37	6	1	0.162	32	2	5	0.844
7	Milverton Four Wheel Drives	11	3	6	0	0	1	0	1	8	.364	3	3	36	55	-19	Won 2	208	46	10	3	0.217	35	1	7	0.8
8	Tillsonburg Thunder	10	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	4	.200	2	2	27	39	-12	Lost 8	231	38	5	1	0.132	40	1	4	0.9
9	Delhi Flames	10	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	0	0	12	88	-76	Lost 10	203	32	2	2	0.063	44	0	20	0.545

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MINOR SPORTS SCRAPBOOK

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Noah Soares takes a quick shot from along the boards during the U9 MD New Hamburg Huskies game this past Sunday.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Hailey Schaaf launches a shot off the rush during last Tuesday's U9 LL Navy Wilmot Wolverines game.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Oliver Doiron sends the puck flying up the ice during the U9 LL 3 New Hamburg Huskies game this past Sunday.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Nick Etue snaps a quick shot from along the wing during this past Sunday's U15 B New Hamburg Huskies game.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Payton McPhee rockets a shot on goal from the high slot during the U18 BB Wilmot Wolverines game last Tuesday.

(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)

Evan Nahrgang fires a wrist shot off his stick during last Saturday's U18 LL Tavistock Titans game.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:
The state of education in Ontario under the Ford Government

On Thursday evening, Nov. 27, I attended a forum on the state of education in Ontario under the Ford government. In the middle of a winter storm, 40 people braved the weather because we all share deep concerns about the future of our public education system.

The speakers included a school board trustee, a secondary school guidance counsellor and the president of a local teachers' union. Each panelist spoke about what it is like to work in public schools under this government, and common themes emerged throughout the evening: chronic underfunding, a lack of adequate support personnel, unsafe school environments and increasingly high class sizes.

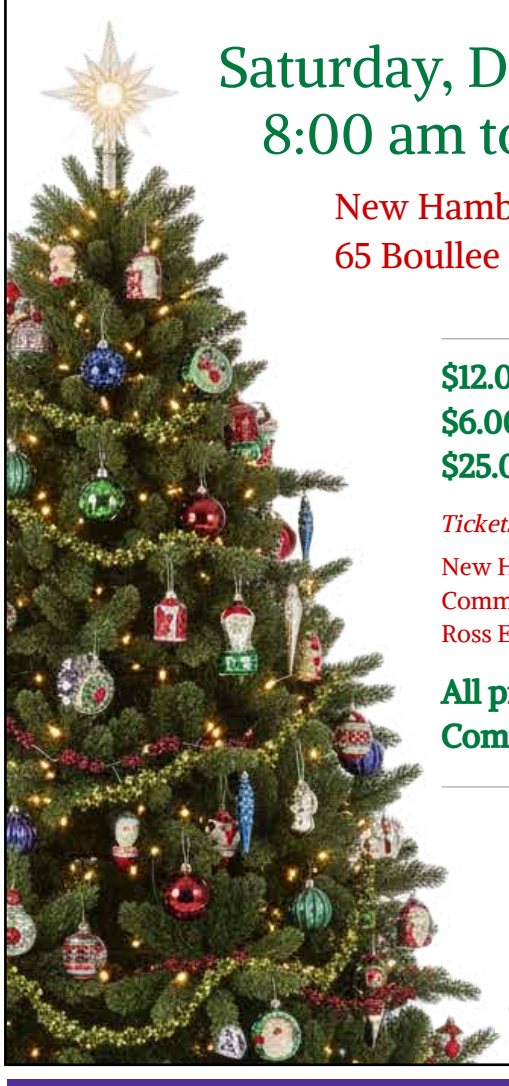
Particularly troubling was the discussion of rising violence against teachers – especially female teachers – and the critical shortage of adults in the schools to address escalating student needs. Panelists made it clear that the current environment is not healthy for students or educators.

Ontario's children and teachers deserve better. I urge readers to write to their MPP and to the premier and demand meaningful action and investment. Our public education system is being neglected, and the Ford government must be held accountable for the students and educators it is leaving behind.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives states that since 2018, the Ontario Public School system has been underfunded by $6.3 billion. All citizens should be outraged at this travesty.

Kathryn Murrell,
New Hamburg

Community Care Concepts' Annual
Christmas Breakfast



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Gazette Puzzles

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Reese is a large-breed mix who came to the shelter skin and bones and unsure of the world. He can be nervous meeting new people, but offer him a treat and he'll become your instant best friend.

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Echinacea: The bountiful native flower with heaps of health benefits

HEAPS OF HEALTHY TIPS

By Mercedes Kay Gold

Echinacea, an eye-catching body-boosting beautiful botanical also known as the purple coneflower, belonging to the daisy and sunflower family. Echinacea is native to Ontario and the rest of eastern and central North America. Walking through Wilmot, this wondrous wildflower is easy to spot growing in open wooded areas.

Echinacea has been used as a medicinal herb for over 400 years, and still a popular go-to as a dietary supplement today. Echinacea is best known as a tea in holistic circles but for those who favour over-the-counter helpers, echinacea is the key ingredient in a popular drug-store fix for the common cold.

The plant is a potent powerhouse and the upper parts, seeds and roots are the key components thanks to their concentration of amazing antioxidants. Defending the body against stress leads to thriving and therefore living in a state of balance. Reducing inflammation decreases one's odds of suffering from chronic diseases.

Boosting immunity means offsetting acute and chronic sickness. Echinacea's all-star antioxidants include flavonoids, cichoric and rosmarinic acid. The highest levels are found in the leaves and roots. Echinacea also contains alkamides, powerful plant compounds which increase antioxidant activity.

Echinacea may also lower blood-sugar levels holistically. Improving blood sugar and inulin sensitivity promotes healthy weight management and therefore lowering the odds of being diagnosed with type-2 diabetes. Fast fact; in 2024, approximately 3.6 million Canadians had type-2 diabetes. Type-2 is reversable with lifestyle changes. The number of cases is projected to increase dramatically by 2034.

More studies are needed but there's some evidence showing echinaceha offers protection against cancer due to immune-boosting properties.

Mother Nature provides heaps of skin healing topically. The awesome anti-inflammatory and antibacterial action are astounding for those suffering with abscesses, boils, burns, eczema and insect poisoning.

The top three ways to add extraordinary echinacea to your protocol is through steeped tea, capsules and compresses, my personal favorite. Break out a pestle and mash leaves and roots until a paste is formed. Think toothpaste consistency. Next, soak an organic piece of cloth in hot water and squeeze out any excess water. Apply the paste onto the affected area and cover with the hot cloth. I like placing a hot water bottle on top.

(VECTEEZY PHOTO)

From garden to teacup — echinacea's vibrant petals and soothing brew underscore its reputation as a go-to herbal aid during cold and flu season.

Before reaching for over-the-counter cold and flu medications this snowy season, keep in mind those options are manmade. They contain synthetic colours, high sodium levels, side effects and may interfere with medications. Nature provides its own medicine chest. Give it a whirl this winter.

People with allergies to ragweed, marigolds and the rest of the daisy family are at risk for allergic reactions. Before beginning anything new, check with your health practitioner.

Wishing you a cold-and-flu-free winter season. Keep this herbal helper in mind when planning your 2026 garden. It's easy to grow, thriving in full sun, well-drained soil and typically purplish-pink with orange, red or white adding a splash of color.

More goodwill than Grinch this Christmas

INTERFAITH COUNSELLING CENTRE

By John Dinner

Christmas remains a cherished holiday; our dark winter days brightened by lights on lampposts, familiar carols on the radio and family gatherings that run on shortbread, butter tarts and childhood memories. But even for us Canadians, who pride ourselves on politeness, the season isn't always as serene as Christmas cards suggest. Holiday dinners can be as combustible as Christmas crackers.

Every time at this year, there seems to be a new crop of issues creating conflict rather than glad tidings. But is arguing really how we want to spend our time together? Maybe not, but often we do.

Arguments follow a predictable pattern and not in ways that lead to peace on earth or at the dining room table.

First, our brains are wired to detect problems, not pleasantries. When we disagree, the most active areas of our brain aren't those used for social bonding. Rather, they're what we rely on for complex reasoning. Your brain reacts to disagreement like a puzzle to solve, not an opportunity to learn.

Second, our ability to evaluate arguments plummets the second you encounter a disagreeable opinion. The posterior medial prefrontal cortex — your internal "argument strength detector" — shuts down and you instantly become worse at judging the validity of what's just been said.

If things escalate further, the amygdala takes over, flooding you with emotion. That's when our powers of reason give way to anger towards the very relative you came to celebrate with.

If "winning" feels more important than "fa-la-la-la-ing," you're likely to find yourself in conflict with the people you love. Harsh words get exchanged, dinners get derailed and the memory of the evening ends up more Grinch than goodwill.

But there is a better way that starts before you even show up for turkey and the fixings. It's a gift that keeps on giving because it's useful right through the New Year, the next 12 months and beyond:

- Consider the cost. Picture two possible outcomes. In one, you say regrettable things and spend Boxing Day rehashing them. In the other, you let the objectionable comment drift by like a wispy, fluttering snowflake and steer the conversation to safer ground. What follows is a warm, enjoyable evening. The second choice is always worth the cost.
- Play the social scientist. Walk into your holiday gathering with curiosity instead of combativeness. Observe, listen and notice how people are feeling (vs. behaving). This simple formula can be remarkably calming — for you and everyone else.
- Practice gratitude. Thankfulness alters how we see the world. It makes us more patient and tolerant. A grateful mind is less likely to turn a dinner table into a debate stage.
- Keep learning. Happiness follows a simple cycle of learning, applying and sharing. Learn what fosters peace and connection, apply those habits at your holiday table and then pass them along (after the stuffing). Christmas is about giving and the best gift this year may come in the form of patience, restraint and understanding.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays.

John Dinner is a registered psychotherapist who works as a counsellor at Interfaith Counselling Centre in New Hamburg. He sometimes thinks he's right and has a hard time making room for someone else's wrong opinion.

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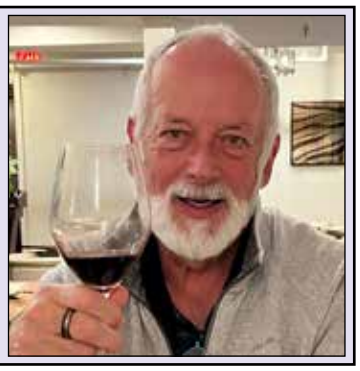
A qualified "yes" on visiting two popular Toronto attractions

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO



By Paul Knowles

Their beginnings are almost a century apart, but the Royal Ontario Museum and Ripley's Aquarium of Canada have a lot in common. They are two of the most-visited attractions in Toronto. They both are part of the Toronto CityPASS program that provides some significant discounts on admission prices. And they both offer a blend of entertainment and education to people of all ages.

So, all that being said, should you plan to brave the horrendous traffic and head to Toronto right away to take in these two attractions? My answer would be a qualified "yes."

Why qualified? Different reasons for the two places. Let's start with the ROM. Most of us remember school trips to the ROM in decades past. After all, the Royal Ontario Museum has been open since 1914, so it predates all of us.

If you are like me, your three main memories are of dinosaur skeletons, Egyptian mummies and row after row of jam-packed cases loaded with a mind-boggling assortment of historical artifacts.

That's not the ROM of today – though you can find most of these things in the museum somewhere. The ROM is modernizing big time and this is actually the reason for my "qualified yes" – because the museum is smack in the middle of a three-year, multi-million-dollar revitalization of the main floor and some of the second floor. The transformation impacts 86,000 square feet on the main floor and creates 6,000 square feet of new gallery space on the second floor. So, lots of the building is closed to visitors.

Change is certainly in the air at the ROM and not only concerning the physical space. After a decade in the position, director and CEO Josh Basseches has resigned and Yoke Chung and Jennifer Wild, already part of the museum's executive leadership team, are becoming co-directors and CEOs as of Jan. 1.

So, the ROM is in transition and visitors need to be aware of this. That does not mean there is nothing to experience here – there is still a lot of the permanent collection on display, there are new innovations to enjoy and there are many current, temporary exhibitions ranging from "Saints, Sinners, Lovers and Fools: 300 years of Flemish masterworks" to "Sharks" to an intriguing exhibition entitled, "Layers in Time," focused on southwestern Ontario's unique, meromictic lake, Crawford Lake.

And, in a slightly obvious segue, thinking of water takes us south from the ROM to Ripley's Aquarium.

It's a much newer part of the Toronto scene, having opened in 2013, 99 years after the ROM welcomed its first visitor. And while the ROM is working toward being a modern, state-of-the-art destination, Ripley's accomplished that goal from the get-go.

So why do I also give the aquarium a "qualified yes." Here, it all depends on when you go. We visited recently, on a Saturday, and the place was jammed wall to all with family groups. Great for the kids to be there, but a challenge to navigate. So, my qualification is Ripley's Aquarium is a terrific place to visit but do avoid high-volume days. Ripley's recommends avoiding the hours of 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekdays, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends and holidays. I agree!

If you can miss the uber-crowds, there is a lot to love about the place. The moving sidewalk that carries you inside the aquarium where you are surrounded by sharks, sea turtles and dozens of species of fish is amazing. The Ray Bay, which allows visitors to actually touch a ray, is magical. And while the big features draw the most attention, there are marvels in smaller exhibits as well, including sea horses and sea dragons.

Ripley's has also taken their Canadian location seriously with really fine exhibits of Canadian species, both freshwater and ocean. Everyone loves the blue lobsters.

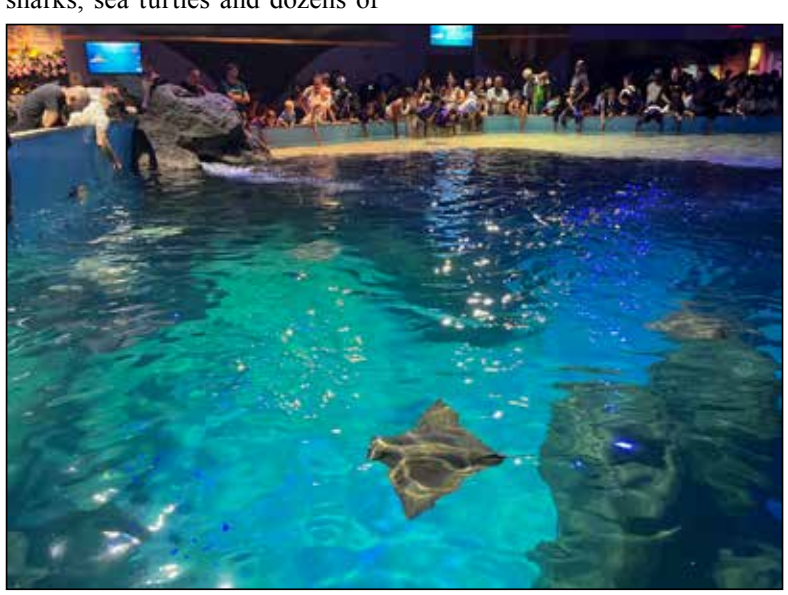
The attraction has, from the beginning, been over-the-top kid friendly. In fact, there are tunnels through water features, viewing areas and other nooks and crannies that are only accessible to children, which I personally think is very unfair. Heck, I'd like to crawl through a school of fish, except I would most certainly get stuck. So, let's leave it to the kids who love it.

I mentioned the Toronto CityPASS. Here's the current math for one adult. The CityPASS costs $129.96 and a child's pass is $92.92.

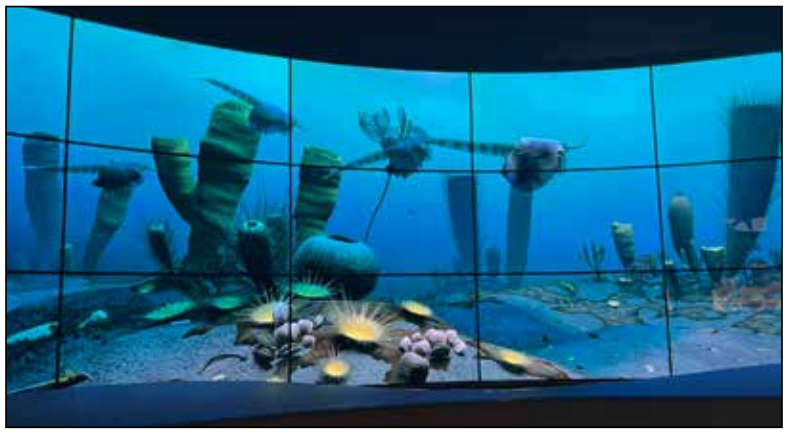
That gets you into the CN Tower, Ripley's Aquarium and three other attractions from a list including the ROM, the Toronto Zoo, Casa Loma and more. If you did all five, you would be paying $182 for an adult. Even visiting just three, you save money with the CityPASS.

Whether you use that pass or simply plan a visit to one or two places, the aquarium is definitely worth a visit – away from peak hours – and the ROM, even under construction, still offers many of the wonders that we remember from when we were school kids, and promises a lot more to come.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



Ray Bay allows visitors to touch the rays as they swim past.



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

A new, high-tech feature at the Royal Ontario Museum: a video featuring undersea creatures of the Cambrian period.

Yes, there are still dinosaurs to be found at the ROM.

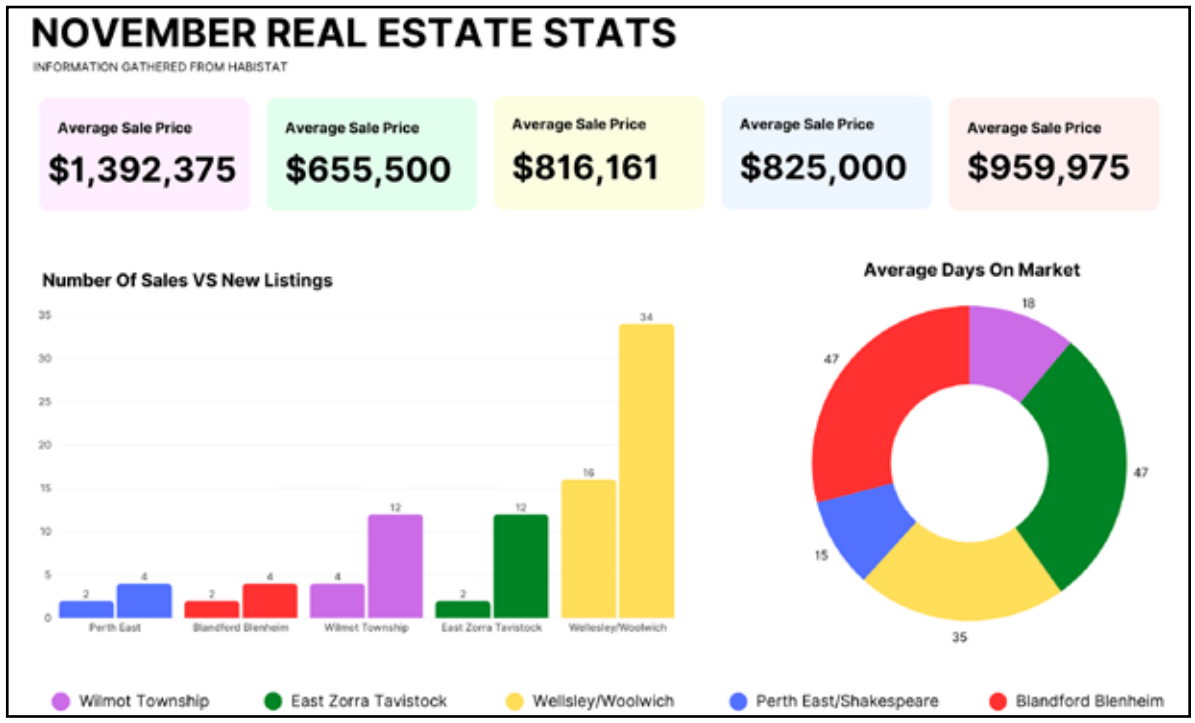
Peak hours at Ripley's Aquarium can mean large crowds.

The Toronto aquarium gives lots of attention to Canadian creatures of our lakes and oceans, including this muskie.

How much is your Wilmot and area home worth in 2025?

EXPERT REAL ESTATE ADVICE

By Isabel Livingston



If you live in Wilmot Township or the surrounding rural pockets like Haysville, Petersburg, Wellesley, or Tavistock, you've probably noticed a shift in the real estate market. After several years of rapid price growth followed by a cooling-off period, homeowners are wondering how much their home is actually worth today.

Prices have softened in southern Ontario but not evenly; values have adjusted from the pandemic highs. However, the Wilmot area is still competitive even with lower inventory, especially in family neighbourhoods. Rural properties have strong demand and KW buyers are still moving out of the city for more space and affordability.

The type of home you have and the condition of it are some of the largest factors when it comes to determining value. Detached family homes with modern kitchens, updated flooring, finished basements or, better yet, multi-generational or in-law suites are some of the things buyers are after.

The KW spillover is still keeping the Wilmot area stable. Most people don't realize our area's biggest buyer pool comes from KW, as we offer larger lots, quiet, safe communities and short commutes to KW, Stratford and Woodstock. We also offer new subdivisions and better value for the dollar. This spillover helps protect our local prices.

With interest rate levels stabilizing, this is forcing buyers to make more cautious decisions as budgets are stricter and their negotiating power is higher with the current market. However, motivated buyers are still actively upgrading from KW townhouses to larger Wilmot area homes.

There are a lot of things to consider when determining true value; your neighbourhood, your home's condition compared to others listed and how much competition is on the market in your price range. Two identical houses can vary in value depending on timing and condition.

So how much is your home worth? In short, every home is unique. To get a clear picture of your property's value, a detailed home evaluation, breakdown of comparables and a strategy to maximize your value is where I would start. If you are thinking of selling in 2026, now is the perfect time to start planning.

For questions or article suggestions, reach out anytime by emailing me at isabel.livingston@century21.ca or calling 226-232-4236.

Isabel Livingston is a sales representative at Century 21 Heritage House Ltd., Brokerage.

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CAMSAFE

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Oxford County 4-H Classic Team gains skills and confidence at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Nine members of the Oxford County 4-H Dairy Classic Team returned from this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair feeling energized by the experience and grateful for the chance to compete on a national stage.

For many, it was their first time at the Royal, while others were returning competitors who helped guide the newer team members through the busy week.

This year's group reflected a transition within the club, with half the team made up of first-time Classic participants and several longtime members aging out of the 4-H program. Even so, Oxford County made a strong showing. The team earned the fifth-best exhibit overall, while individual members brought home impressive placings.

Sophia Doan showed the third-prize winter heifer, Maci Hampson earned third in the Ayrshire class, and Jackson Sim placed 13th in the Holstein Spring Yearling class. With many of the 2025 participants eligible to return, hopes are high for an even stronger performance at the 2026 Royal.

Members said the weeklong competition not only improved their skills but also connected them with 4-H dairy youth and leaders from across Canada. The Classic remains one of the most anticipated events of the year for 4-H members who dream of working in agriculture.

Those who have completed the program consistently say they wouldn't trade the experience for anything. Agricultural employers agree, noting a 4-H background signals genuine interest in the industry, hands-on learning and a strong work ethic.

The Oxford County 4-H dairy community extends its gratitude to the volunteers, leaders, sponsors and families who support the program year after year. Their efforts help build the next generation of dairy farmers and ensure Oxford County maintains its reputation as the Dairy Capital of Canada.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Members of the Oxford County 4-H Dairy Classic Team who competed at this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. In the front row from left: Maci Hampson, Jasmine Steen, Megan Atkinson and Sophia Doan. In the back row from left: Gavin Da Silva, Nathan Wilker, Jackson Sim, Keenan Grieve and Carmyn Doan.

Perth County Holstein Club draws strong crowd despite stormy weather

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Members of the Perth County Holstein Breeders' Association gathered recently for their annual meeting at the impressive new robotic dairy facility operated by Brian, Cory and Claire Vink of Vinksland Holsteins near St. Paul's Station in Perth South.

Despite stormy weather, the turnout was exceptional with breeders from across the county taking the opportunity to tour the modern barn and connect with fellow producers.

County Holstein clubs across Ontario exist to promote the breeding and sale of registered Holstein cattle while fostering cooperation, friendship and shared learning among members. They support the work of the Ontario Holstein Branch and Holstein Association of Canada, and place a strong emphasis on youth engagement through programs such as 4-H dairy clubs.

The current Perth County Holstein Breeders executive includes past president TJ DeWit, president Sjoerd Kemmere, first vice-president Luis Velazquez and second vice-president Geoff McMullen. Emma Payne continues to serve as club secretary and may be contacted at infopchc@gmail.com.

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

A large group of Perth County Holstein breeders gathered at the Vink family's dairy facility for the meeting and election of directors.

Vinksland is home to a strong lineup of Red and White Holsteins, including this two year-old shown after milking in one of the farm's three DeLaval robots.

A high-quality TMR ration is mixed daily to support strong production in the Vinksland herd.

S.H.E.D. Talk brings farmers together for rural mental health conversation

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Both the federal and provincial governments have acknowledged in recent years that rural mental health needs stronger support. Last week, that commitment took the spotlight inside the North Easthope barn of Martin Ritsma, who is not only the mayor of Stratford but also a longtime Perth County farmer.

Ritsma hosted a morning of S.H.E.D. Talks, which stands for Sustain Healthy Farms through Empowerment and Dedication, bringing farmers together to discuss wellness, connection and support.

Attendees listened closely as speakers shared insights into farmer-focused mental health programs now available across the province. Gwen Devereaux, president of Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health in Seaforth, outlined the Farmer Wellness Initiative, a free service offering confidential mental health counselling for farmers and farm families.

She explained the program can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week through a dedicated telehealth line at 1-866-267-6255. Counselling is available in English or French, by phone, virtually or in person. More information is available at www.farmerwellnessinitiative.ca.

Devereaux said the goal is simple: reduce isolation, offer timely support and help farmers navigate the pressures unique to agriculture. Farming, she noted, is demanding and often solitary work, and the initiative creates ways for producers to lean on one another while also accessing trained professionals.

Longtime crop specialist Peter Johnson, known to most as "Wheat Pete," also spoke. Drawing on decades with Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and his own field

Continued on page 29

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Gwen Devereaux of Seaforth said S.H.E.D. Talks aim to reduce social isolation and create a welcoming space where farmers can share experiences, build connections and support one another.

"Wheat Pete" Johnson spoke about the stresses of farming – from markets to weather – and urged producers to take advantage of the growing number of no-cost mental health supports available across Ontario.

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MILEAGE - 89,338 KM STOCK #: P22587

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2025 Chrysler Grand Caravan SXT

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LOW KMS - 15,003 KM STOCK #: P22593

2023 Kia Telluride SX

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Continued from page 28

experience, he noted that stress can overwhelm a farmer quickly, especially during seasons with low prices, disappointing yields or extreme weather. He encouraged those in the crowd to make use of programs such as Gateway's Well Being Supports, and reminded farmers that reaching out for help is an essential part of keeping themselves and their operations healthy.

The session also included remarks from chairman Tom Melady and Ritsma, who shared personal stories about their own families' struggles in years past. Both noted how valuable a service like Gateway would have been at that time and emphasized how important it is for rural Ontario to reduce stigma and create comfortable spaces for difficult conversations.

Actor Rod Beattie added lighter moments through stories of Walt Wingfield and the fictional Persephone Township. His humour resonated with the audience and underscored that laughter can play a meaningful role in easing stress during challenging times on the farm.

Chairman Tom Melady, joined by host Martin Ritsma, shared personal reflections on past family struggles and the value a rural-focused wellness network would have provided.

Rod Beattie entertained the crowd with Walt Wingfield stories, reminding farmers that humour can be a powerful coping tool

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR - DECEMBER 2025

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Community movie night at Zion United
7:15 p.m.
Featuring The Muppet Christmas carol. Free admission. Please join us.
Zion United Church
215 Peel Street, New Hamburg

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

Cedarview's Christmas Bazaar
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Enjoy unique artisan and handmade goods, festive crafts and décor, seasonal snacks, and live holiday music. Plus - don't miss a special visit from Santa Claus for kids and kids-at-heart! Admission is free! Please bring a non-perishable item or donate to support our local food bank. For more information call 226-640-4251
Cedarview Senior Living
511 Finkle Street, Woodstock

Optimist Club of Wilmot Christmas Craft and Gift Sale
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
40+ tables with craft and other gift ideas. Silent auction & bake sale table. Lunch available for purchase. Photos with Santa (bring your own device)
All proceeds to Youth and Community Services
Wilmot Recreation Complex
1291 Nafziger Road, Baden

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Wellesley Council meeting
6:45 p.m.
Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

Community Care/Optimist Club of New Hamburg Christmas Charity Breakfast
8-11 a.m.
Adults $12.00 Children $6.00 Family of 4 $25.00 - Tickets at the door.
All proceeds to Community Care Concepts
New Hamburg Legion
65 Boulee St., New Hamburg

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

The Tavistock Opti-Mrs. are sponsoring a Free Public Skate
3-4 p.m.
All children up to Grade 8 will receive a ticket for chips and a drink
Tavistock & District Recreation Centre
1 Adam St., Tavistock

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

Perth East council meeting
7 p.m.
Council chambers
25 Mill Street East, Milverton

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

East Zorra-Tavistock Council meeting
7 p.m.
Council Chambers
89 Loveys Street East, Hickson

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

Wellesley Council Budget Meeting
9 a.m.
Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

Wilmot Council meeting
7-11 p.m.
Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road W., Baden

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Read the Bible in a Year in Community
Morning meeting 6:00am daily
Evening meeting 6:00pm daily
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Email address: arthur.rosh@gmail.com
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EVERY WEDNESDAY

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Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
65 Boulee St., New Hamburg

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Pickleball Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon, 12-4. Contact: Don Junker 519-535-7052
Cards Monday , Wednesday afternoon 1-4, euchre, crib (bring board), etc. Just drop in to play, good to bring someone . Contact: Bob Routly 519-301-2118
Inside walking Monday & Wednesday morning 8.30-12. Contact: Larry Brown 519-240-6715
Crokinole Monday , Wednesday morning 8.30-12, Just drop in to play, good to bring someone. Contact: John Schultz 519-655-2346
Shuffleboard @ arena, Wednesday 12:30-4 and Thursday 10-4. Contact: Don Junker 519-535-7052.
VON Smart Seniors Exercise, Tuesday and Thursday morning 9 - 10; Village Manor 10:25 - 11:25. Contact: 519-539-1231 x 6285

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7	4	1	2	3	8	9	5	6
9	3	2	5	6	7	8	1	4
8	5	6	9	4	1	2	7	3
5	2	8	4	1	3	7	6	9
4	9	3	6	7	2	5	8	1
6	1	7	8	9	5	4	3	2
2	8	4	3	5	6	1	9	7
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1. 16 times
2. Bletchley Park
3. Wolfram
4. False
5. 1993
6. Victoria
7. Iceland
8. Kellogg's Frosted Flakes
9. Every 10 days
10. Tongue

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